

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 338 397

PS 019 984

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TITLE Literacy: America's Working Partnership.
INSTITUTION Texas Tech Univ., Lubbock. Inst. for Child and Family Studies.
SPONS AGENCY Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Jan 89
CONTRACT G90CD0559/02
NOTE 37p.; Developed by the Resource Support Group.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; Adult Literacy; Adults; At Risk Persons; Children; Educationally Disadvantaged; Elementary Secondary Education; *Functional Literacy; Functional Reading; High Risk Students; *Illiteracy; *Literacy Education; Phonics; Preschool Education; *Reading Readiness; Reading Skills; *Social Problems

ABSTRACT

This document examines the problem of illiteracy. The first chapter provides background and general information about illiteracy, while the second chapter distinguishes between "illiterate" and "functionally illiterate," and provides a new look at the concept of functionality. The third chapter begins with a section about illiteracy in the United States which considers population statistics regarding ethnic groups, age, and other factors. The second section of the third chapter identifies areas of cost which can be directly attributed to inefficiency caused by illiteracy. The fourth chapter traces the influences and effects of illiteracy in families and looks at the services of literacy programs for adults and children. A comprehensive and sequential model of the developmental aspects of literacy is offered in the fifth chapter. In the sixth, the causes of illiteracy are examined. A methodological approach to literacy training through reading readiness that is applicable to adults and children is proposed in the seventh chapter. The eighth chapter emphasizes the importance of the phonics system for children and adults, and the ninth offers suggestions for literacy training. (SH).

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Literacy

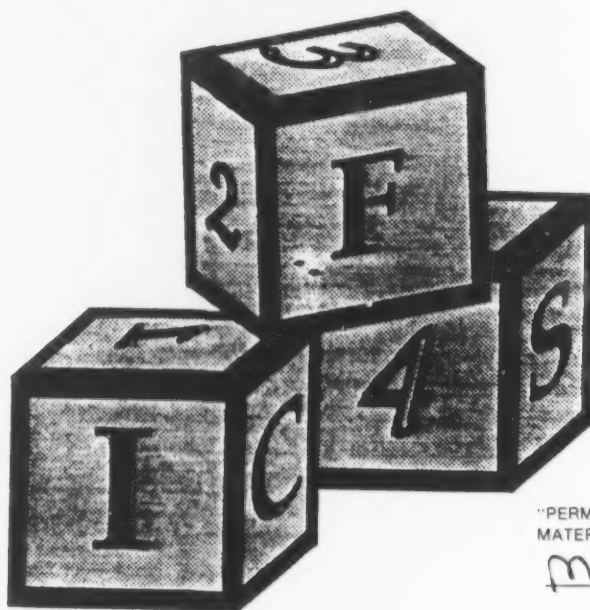
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America's Working Partnership



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This publication was prepared pursuant to Grant No. 90CD0559/02: from Resource Support Center. Contractors undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their judgment in professional and technical matters. Points of view or opinions, therefore, do not necessarily represent official DHHS policy or positions.

January, 1989, Institute for Child and Family Studies * Texas Tech University *
Lubbock, Texas

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A slice of life (1)

He is meticulous and well-defended.

He gets up in the morning, showers, shaves and dresses in a dark grey business suit, then goes downstairs and buys a *New York Times* from the small newsstand on the corner of his street. Folding it neatly, he goes into the subway and arrives at work at 9 A.M.

He places the folded *New York Times* next to the briefcase on his desk and sets to work on graphic illustrations for the advertising copy that is handed to him by the editor who is his boss.

"Run over this with me. Just make sure I get the gist of what you really want."

The editor, unsuspecting, takes this as a reasonable request. In the process of expanding on his copy, he recites the language of the text: a language that is instantly imprinted on the illustrator's mind.

At lunch he grabs the folded copy of the *New York Times*, carries it with him to a coffee

(continues on page 2)

LANGUAGE, EDUCATION AND LITERACY

Language plays an important role in education—it is the central engine for the meanderings of social interaction. Most everyone reads and writes fluently and manages with ease to transcribe, decode and transfer the printed messages that make up the sensible context of our "communication society." Or so it goes ...

However, in bleak contrast to the pervasive rhetoric of the so-called American Dream, there is the silent voice of a pretty child with pale cheeks and secretive eyes. Growing up in a world populated with Cyrillic signs that harbor the promise of knowledge and the best of all futures, many children (and their parents) wade through a cognitive morass of confusion, incomprehension and, finally, despair. They are illiterate which, in our complexified and linguistified world, translates into utter helplessness and dependency. Consequently, literacy constitutes more than a primarily mechanical skill of deciphering and (de)coding printed signifiers into material signifieds (a semiotic operation), but entails an essential submersion (and *de facto* participation) in the requirements and responsibilities of social life (an existential operation).

A slice of life (I) continued

shop, places it beside his plate, eats a sandwich, drinks a beer, and soon heads back to work.

At 5 P.M., he takes his briefcase and his New York Times, waits for the elevator and walks two blocks to catch an uptown bus, stops at a corner store to buy some groceries, then goes upstairs. He carefully unfolds his New York Times. He places it with mechanical precision on a pile of several other recent copies of the New York Times. There they will remain until, when two or three more copies have been added, he will take all but the one most recent and consign them to the trash that goes into a plastic bag that will be left for pickup by the truck that comes around during the night and, with a groaning roar, collects and crushes and compresses all the garbage of the occupants of this and other residential buildings of New York.

Then he returns upstairs. He opens the refrigerator, snaps the top from a cold can of Miller's beer, and turns on the TV.

Next day, trimly dressed and cleanly shaven, he will

(Continues on page 3)

Therefore, literacy reflects a swirling amalgam of psychological, social as well as linguistic processes whose solution cannot solely reside in a unilateral "teaching process" of mechanical operations (i.e., the acquisition of an "alphanumeric" skill or the mnemotechnic rules underwriting the sensory-manual motorics of plain writing). While this constitutes an important (and, admittedly, difficult and essential) starting point, literacy training cannot end there. Indeed, the intergenerational transfer (and perpetuation) of illiteracy precludes any form of one-dimensional "quick fix" and suggests a multidimensional approach which weaves educational, sociological and political considerations into a multifabric creed of literacy excellence. It is evident that the pedagogical timebomb fueled by an unchecked and unremedied perpetuation of illiteracy in subsequent generations of poor and disadvantaged—a vicious cycle in itself!—requires not only a fast (for the bomb is ticking louder every day) but also a comprehensive solution.

Indeed, the political complacency and placidity of the 80's has ignored an almost entirely incognitive kind of population and has, as such, debased the cultural currency of the American Dream by allowing the festering growth of a defective sociocultural jigsaw with an alarming and deep, premonitory glow. Furthermore, the nature of the problem is such that it eludes the reigning avenues of cultural visibility, i.e., printed outcries of despair that can be read, assimilated and disseminated. Nowhere do we find the subterranean howls of protest graffitied onto the dilapidated houses of the ghetto or the barrio—nowhere do we read the despairing cries for help next to the eloquent protests of Blacks, Hispanics, gays and feminist factions. They remain silent—which also means "politically mute(d)"! Indeed, the illiterate, fearing another instance of

"being found out," does not show up in the local voting booth—a fact that makes one frown on what is meant by "democracy." Indeed, as Kozol (1985, p.23) contends: "So long as 60 million people are denied significant participation, the government is neither of, nor for, nor by, the people. It is a government, at best, of those two thirds whose wealth, skin color, or parental privilege allows them opportunity to profit from the provocation and instruction of the written word." In other words, literacy means political power while, conversely, illiteracy constitutes a handicap in the realization of the true democratic state.

Afraid "to be found out," illiterates circulate among fellow illiterates, dwell in an oral culture which looks down on written material (and the intellectual tradition for which it stands), and, most often, get absorbed by the "simulation of communication" as the passive recipients (and addicts) of the television machine. "Their lives and even eating schedules have been parceled out to match the thirty-minute packages of cultural domestication and the sixty-second units of purported information which present the news in isolation from the history that shaped it or the future that it threatens to extinguish. (..) For people like these (and there are millions (..)) the following is true: They live in a truncated present tense. The future seems hopeless. The past remains unknown. The amputated present tense, encapsulated by the TV moment, seems to constitute the end and the beginning of cognition" (Kozol, 1985, p.35).

The existential view is bleak as "life outside" remains a constant and unpredictable mystery—so incomprehensible transparent for so many people "out there" who do not even think twice about it. They, in contrast, remain a mute and foggy voice living in the completely wasted landscape of

A slice of life (1) continued
 buy another New York Times, fold it neatly, and proceed to work. He is a rather solitary man. People in his office view him with respect as someone who is self-contained and does not choose to join in casual conversation. If somebody should mention something that is in the news, he will give a dry, sardonic answer based upon the information he has garnered from TV.

He is protected against the outside world. Someday he will probably be trapped. It has happened before; so he can guess it will happen again. Defended for now against humiliation, he is not defended against fear. He tells me that he has recurrent dreams.

"Somebody says: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? I stare at the page. A thousand copies of the New York Times run past me on a giant screen. Even before I am awake, I start to scream.

(source: Kozol, 1985, p.1-2)

A slice of life (2)

"I stood at the bottom of the ramp. My car had broke down on the freeway. There was a phone. I asked for the police. They was nice. They said to tell them where I was. I looked up at the signs. There was one that I had seen before. I read it to them: ONE WAY STREET. They thought it was a joke. I told them I couldn't read. There was other signs above the ramp. They told me to try. I looked around for somebody to help. All the cars was going by real fast. I couldn't make them understand that I was lost. The cop was nice. He told me: "Try once more." I did my best. I only knew the sign above my head. The cop was trying to be nice. He knew that I was trapped. "I can't send out a car to you if you can't tell me where you are." I felt afraid. I nearly cried. I'm forty-eight years old. I only said: "I'm on a one-way street."

typical urban blight—infested by the constant threats of violence and the continuous lure of the anesthesia of drug and alcohol abuse—, while excursions into "that other world" always takes on the form of a hide-and-go-seek game of invincible facades. A complex and complicated reality of mystification and cruel riddles!

Although many local attempts as well as national projects to remedy the situation have been initiated, it remains a drop in the proverbial bucket. Due to the multidimensional nature of the problem, solutions aiming solely at the technical acquisition of reading/writing skills (oftentimes within the arid atmosphere of the classroom) strand on the shores of sociocultural sabotage (e.g., negative peer pressure, the lack of a history of literacy to support individual efforts, no immediate "practical" use or change in personal situation) and the lack of personal motivation and network support. Therefore, it is not surprising that many literacy projects report high drop-out rates in adult education programs. At present, it seems that the intrinsic motivation levels of political refugees (i.e., the alluring promise of the American Dream) yield high success rates in those populations, but that the indigenous American population (who needs it the most!), i.e., the major body of "illiterate America" cursed by a history of domination and subjugation as well as a legacy of intergenerational illiteracy, remains out of reach.

In sum, and metaphorically speaking: illiterate America can be compared to a fish that lives in the water and can see up on the land; however, it does not have any idea as to what is involved in living there.

A Question of Definition

Dictionary definitions of literacy circumscribe it as the ability to read and write as well as the level of education/civilization equated to the adequate use of these skills in vocational and intellectual endeavors. For some, literacy refers to the acquisition of a set of simple cognitive skills; for others, literacy reflects a never-ending process and progress of refining cognitive and social competency. As an immediate result, depending on the definition chosen, either only a small minority or the whole human population can be considered "illiterate." For many, the endless series of controversies and disagreements constitute a political (and theoretical) ploy to ignore the problem, or at best, downplay its significance. However, the problem has become too prevalent (and too costly) to ignore.

On the other hand, the latter is exactly what some—under the guise of "literacy as elitism"—seem to suggest: will illiterate people necessarily be happier after they have been taught "literacy" skills? In this vein Jeanne Chall (1984) asks: "Does literacy make men happy? Only highly literate people seem to ask [this] question. And only the well-educated seem to say that it does not. They are like the rich who doubt that money makes one happy. Significantly, such doubts come only after they have accumulated enough money and do not have to worry... And so with the highly literate. They doubt that literacy will contribute to the happiness of those who are not yet literate only because they themselves use it so well and easily in living, working, playing, and in making choices."

Apart from the apparent one-dimensional philosophy (i.e., literacy = technical reading skills) this view espouses, the "literacy as elitism" opinion comes across as a romanticist and Rousseauesk repetition of the idealism of the "Primitive" whose lack of literacy skills protects him from the cruelty and vicissitudes of corrupt and vile societal life. However, the inundating abundance of printed materials which guide (and prescribe) social life suggest—in contrast—that literacy can no longer be defended as an elitist addition to one cognitive make-up, but the actual condition to exist cognitively in the first place. In this capacity, literacy is the lifeblood of our society and the backbone for societal survival!

Furthermore, literacy in our society holds the key to freedom. Indeed, literate people do not "stick" to what they read and experience, but, through their internal processes of cognitive linking and interpretation, come to (re)structure the world in such a fashion as to create their "own" world, i.e., the world of their opinions and beliefs which reflect the sum total of what

they have learned through the interactive and recursive processes of reading, learning and application. In contrast, illiterate people—the domesticated subjects of the half-hour television sitcoms—remain shackled to the “what they have heard,” i.e., the word and the opinion/interpretation of others. In this vein, literacy holds the key to Man’s emancipation from the screaming rhetoric of radio and television onto a different plain of creative self-definition. Literacy, in short, is the ability to think for and, by extension, be oneself.

In the present text, the comprehensive definition of illiteracy as “perpetual emancipation and civilization” will be abandoned in favor of a distinction between “illiterate” and “functionally illiterate” (or semi-illiterate): while the former refers to those who cannot read at all, the latter applies to the adequate relation of literacy skills to vocational or societal demands. Depending on which definition is favored, different statistical totals are proposed. Moreover, the ambiguity of a term such as “functionally” illiterate, begs the questions as to the “content” of this functionality: functional illiteracy is an elusive concept used to indicate the level of reading, writing and mathematical skills adults need in order to survive and function in their society. Most authors indicate that an 8th grade reading level constitutes functional literacy in America, although some put it higher (12th grade). Kozol (1985, p.10): “I have proposed the following minimal estimates for 1984: 25 million reading either not at all or at less than fifth grade level; 35 million additional persons reading at less than ninth grade level. Note that, in both cases, I am speaking of performance, not years of school attended. It requires ninth grade competence to understand the antidote instructions on a bottle of corrosive kitchenlye, tenth grade competence to understand instructions on a federal income tax return, twelfth grade competence to read a life insurance form. Employment qualifications for all but a handful of domestic jobs begin at ninth grade level. I have argued, therefore, that all of these 60 million people should be called ‘illiterate in terms of U.S. print communication at the present time’.”

If we take these cautious and conservative estimates as a guidepost, it means that at least one third of American adults need to be considered marginal citizens, in the worst sense of the word: they do not and cannot partake in the necessary requirements for normal everyday survival in our society. It is not surprising, then, that educators get alarmed at the fact that at least one person in three cannot read a sentence or even write his or her name without problem.

Moreover, the fluidity of a concept such as “functional illiteracy” indicates the need for a multidimensional approach to illiteracy: while illiteracy might not have been a problem in,

say, the 18th century where 99 percent of the population were illiterate and societal survival did not depend on deciphering written memos, life in the 20th (and by extension, the 21st) century is completely grounded in the written word. This social (and cultural) dimension has too long been ignored and suggests that a fundamental philosophical change in position is needed in the way illiteracy needs to be approached. As a result, projects geared to increasing literacy levels must co-involve a serious commitment to ameliorate living conditions and a perceived sense of justice and equity (the payoff of the newly acquired literacy skills) as well as a willingness to allow the illiterate population to create its own learning environment (less alien than the typical classroom situation) as well as its social, political and cultural context in which the learning occurs. This implies that literacy training is more than the mere acquisition of a set of cognitive skills but entails a complete reshaping of the living conditions of the "illiterate" into a context and a content of "literacy." In short, "literacy" is not only an identifying "label" of the literate person, but also of his/her living arrangement and environment.

However, one of the primary problems embracing a definition of functional illiteracy is the fact that our world is moving at such a rapid pace that definitions of functionality need to be upgraded almost constantly: the levels indicating what is functional are rising faster than the attempts of literacy projects, aimed at graduating functionally literate pupils, to close that same gap.

Given a paycheck and the stub that lists the usual deductions, 26 percent of adult Americans cannot determine if their paycheck is correct. Thirty-six percent, given a W-4 form, cannot enter the right number of exemptions in the proper places on the form. Forty-four percent, when given a series of "help-wanted" ads, cannot match their qualifications to the job requirements. Twenty-two percent cannot address a letter well enough to guarantee that it will reach its destination. Twenty-four percent cannot add their own correct return address to the same envelope. Twenty percent cannot understand an "equal opportunity" announcement. Over 60 percent, given a series of "for sale" advertisements for products new and used, cannot calculate the difference between prices for a new and used appliance. Over 20 percent cannot write a check that will be processed by their bank—or will be processed in the right amount. Over 40 percent are unable to determine the correct amount of change they should receive, given a cash register receipt and the denomination of the bill used for payment.

(source: Kozol, 1985, p.9)

SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

A. Illiteracy in America

Previously, it was indicated that approximately one third of the adult American population operates below a level of functional literacy, i.e., below a reading level of 8th-9th grade, and, as such, is incapable of surviving and coping with the societal requirements independent of outside help. Kozol, in his study on illiteracy, sums the national situation up as follows:

"Twenty-five million American adults cannot read the poison warnings on a can of pesticide, a letter from their child's teacher, or the front page of a daily paper. An additional 35 million read only at a level which

is less than equal to the full survival needs of our society. (...) The

largest numbers of illiterate

adults are white, native-born

Americans. In proportion to

population, however, the

figures are higher for blacks

and Hispanics than for

whites. Sixteen percent of

white adults, 44 percent of

blacks, and 56 percent of

Hispanic citizens are

functional or marginal illit-

erates. Figures for the

younger generation of black

adults are increasing. Forty-seven

percent of all black seventeen-year-olds

are functionally illiterate. That figure is expected to climb to 50 percent by 1990.

Fifteen percent of recent graduates of urban high school read at less than sixth grade

The Three Myths of Literacy

Myth #1

The Third World Remains Poor
Because Most of the Populations is illiterate

Myth #2

The Nations of the World are Rated on a Scale
Comparing their Literacy Levels

No internationally recognized inventory of skills exists
by which to measure literacy

Myth #3

What We Need is a Reliable Definition of Literacy

The absence of a clear definition often appears to be a significant
hindrance to effective action; no criteria exist even within a
nation for determining what it means to be literate

Source: Hunter, 1987, p 2-4

level. One million teenage children between twelve and seventeen cannot read above the third grade level. Eighty-five percent of juveniles who come before the courts are functionally illiterate. half the heads of households classified below the poverty line by federal standards cannot read an eighth grade book. Over one third of mothers who receive support from welfare are functionally illiterate. Of 8 million unemployed adults, 4 to 6 million lack the skills to be retrained for hi-tech jibs.

The United States ranks forty-ninth among 158 member nations of the U.N. in its literacy levels."

In stark contrast, all projects, geared toward increasing literacy levels, reach only 4 percent of their target population.

While total illiteracy is not the most prevalent problem in the United States, semi-literacy and functional illiteracy are—not only in adult populations but, increasingly, in student populations. Blumfeld (1973) indicates that 25 percent of students nationwide experience significant reading difficulties, whereas in large metropolitan areas up to 50 percent of the urban students read below their grade requirements. As a result, more than half of the unemployed youths (16~21 years old) are functionally illiterate, while 75 percent of juvenile offenders in New York City experience extreme reading difficulties. Similar numbers (approximately 70 percent) have been reported in assessments of reading and writing levels of military recruits.

In conclusion: it is no exaggeration to state that, with the increasing urban decay and the concomitant widening of the poverty gap, there is a literacy gap which has taken on epidemic proportions.

B. Economic and Human Repercussion of Illiteracy

Based on Kozol's 1985 study on illiteracy, several areas of inflated cost can be identified which can directly be attributed to inefficiency caused by illiteracy:

- **Direct costs to taxpayers:**

- * "Six billion dollars yearly ... go to child welfare costs and unemployment

compensation caused directly by the numbers of illiterate adults unable to perform at standards necessary for available employment." (p.13)

- * "\$6.6 billion yearly is the minimal cost of prison maintenance for an estimated 260,000 inmates—out of a total state and federal prison population of about 440,000—whose imprisonment has been directly linked to functional illiteracy. The prison population represents the single highest concentration of adults illiterates." (p.13)
 - * "Swollen court costs, law enforcement budgets in those urban areas in which two fifths of all adults are unemployable for lack of literacy skills, not even to speak of the high cost of crime to those who are its victims, cannot be guessed but must be many times the price for prison maintenance." (p.14)
 - * "Several billion dollars go to workers' compensation, damage to industrial equipment, and industrial insurance costs directly caused by on-site accidents related to the inability of workers to read safety warnings, chemical-content designations, and directions for operating complex machines." (p.14)
 - * "Health expenditures necessitated by the inability of the illiterate adult to use preventive health care measures are not documented. We cannot guess the vast expense required for obstetric or abortion services to women whose unwanted pregnancies are often linked to lack of information caused by the inability to read. So too with the cost of mental health care and of rehabilitation programs for drug users and for alcoholics. Emotional stress and frequently interrupted desperation are familiar patterns in the life of an illiterate adult. If there is no way to calculate these costs, we can believe that they run into many billions." (p.14)
- **Business costs:**
 - * Many job offerings remained unanswered because applicants do not possess the needed qualifications. Those who accept illiterate personnel concluded that many

tasks needed to be repeated frequently in order to make them error-free (e.g., retyping documents as typist did not know correct spelling or right punctuation rule).

- * Loss of business contacts, because important messages that were left were never recorded by illiterate personnel and, as such, translate into "missed business opportunities."
- * **Postal services:**
 - * "Billing, banking, public disclosure information, customers' rights (above all, the right to be informed what those "rights" might be) depend upon communication through the mails. Yet even notices of undelivered letters left in the mailbox by the postal services will be read only with difficulty by a minimum of 35 million people. They will not be nread at all by 25 million more." (p.15)

Apart from these "money" costs, there is the—probably more devastating—consequence of human loss, i.e., missed opportunities for learning ("a mind is a terrible thing to waste") as well as loss of human life due to incompetence.

Newspapers complain about the lack of readers: half of the American population never reads a newspaper, while most of the "popular" newspapers are written on a twelfth grade reading level. Hence, the popularity of *USA Today*, a simplistic and colorful "newspaper" that tries to emulate the instant flash of the tele-visual medium. In addition, books have long since

A slice of life (3)

Illiterates cannot read the letters that their children bring home from their teachers. They cannot study school department circulars that tell them of the courses that their children must be taking if they hope to pass the SAT exams. They cannot help with homework. They cannot write a letter to the teacher. They are afraid to visit in the classroom. They do not want to humiliate their child or themselves.

Illiterates cannot read instruction on a bottle of prescription medicine. They cannot find out when a medicine is past the year of safe consumption; nor can they read the allergenic risks, warnings to diabetics, or the potential sedative effect of certain kinds of non-prescription pills. They cannot observe preventive health care admonitions.

(Continues on page 12)

A slice of life (3) continued

They cannot read about "the seven warning signs of cancer" or the indications of blood-sugar fluctuations or the risks of eating certain food that aggravate the likelihood of cardiac arrest.

Illiterates live, in more than literal ways, an uninsured existence. They cannot understand the written details on a health insurance form. They cannot read the waivers that they sign preceding surgical procedures. Several women ... have entered a slum hospital with the intention of obtaining a tubal ligation and have emerged a few days later after having been subjected to a hysterectomy. Unaware of their rights, intimidated by the jargon, intimidated by the unfamiliar air of fear and atmosphere of ether that so many of us find oppressive in the confines even of the most attractive and expensive

(Continues on page 13)

surrendered the scene in favor of the grandiose constructions and the suffocating influence of television.

More dramatically—at least in a direct physical sense—, there is the loss of human lives as machine operators do not or cannot read the manuals of the dangerous contraptions they operate. In contrast to the written records of printed materials (which bypass the constant reliance on memory) illiterates are more prone to forget important aspects of sequential operations (e.g., car or plane maintenance) which surpass routine chores and tasks. Forgetting one step in a repair sequence could easily prove fatal to a large group of people (e.g., maintenance of a jet engine). Furthermore, as was demonstrated before, military installations and barracks seem to have an over-representation of (functionally) illiterate personnel: conceivably, there is a chance that someone fakes reading the manual on missile security systems—out of fear to be "found out" or ridiculed!

Finally, excellence in academic education cannot but suffer as the group of functionally illiterates keeps on growing (mainly due to the rapid increases in the definition of societal functionality) and, by its sheer enormity, will start to drag the whole system down onto new levels of inertia and ineptitude. As Sticht (1978, p.4) summarizes:

"Today there is much concern that many of our high schools may be graduating thousands of students whose literacy skills are so low they will be barely able to function in society. This concern stems from stories that occur frequently in the popular press which refer to court cases where students with high school diplomas suddenly

discover they cannot read well enough to get a decent job, so they sue their school for not properly educating them. Additionally, reports from various surveys, national assessments, and major government studies say that millions of adults, including young adults right out of high school, are "functionally illiterate"; they cannot fill out forms, use maps, read reference books well, write a check correctly, ... And as for those students who are functionally illiterate, the results of many tests for selecting students for higher education have shown a precipitous decline over the last decade."

A slice of life (3) continued

medical facilities, they have signed their names to documents they could not read and which nobody, in the hectic situation that prevails so often in those overcrowded hospitals that serve the urban poor, had even bothered to explain.

[source: Kozol, 1985, p.24]

The Cycle of Illiteracy

It is well known that a child's performance in school largely depends on the support it gets from its parents. As Sticht's notion of "the intergenerational transfer of illiteracy" indicates, a child's literacy level will strongly be influenced by his or her parents' literacy level and the extent to which the family culture values literacy in general. As a result, children from non-literate homes will have a harder time in their "quest for literacy" than children from "literate" homes in that they will not only lack the prerequisite "reading readiness" (actively fostered in many literate homes in the preschool years) but will also miss the necessary network and family support once they do start reading and writing. This double strategy of (unintentional and understandable) "sabotage" undermines a child's chances for literacy from the beginning. It is obvious that the defensive attitude of illiterate parents (i.e., their fear to be "found out") does not contribute positively to the literacy

development of their children. This cycle of illiteracy indicates at the same time the enormous difficulty of any literacy project as well as its solution in that a two-pronged approach seems necessary in order to flip the cycle of illiteracy into a more productive cycle of literacy. Only if reading teachers can recruit the parents in an "adult literacy" program will they be effective teachers for their children. Apart from this obvious strategy, one cannot ignore the after-class and in-home cross-fertilization of the reading attitude and motivation from parent to child (and vice versa). The importance of this "cycle of literacy training" is underscored by Melton's observation (1976, p.57) that "[t]here are always more literate members of a society than persons who have gone to schools. The children of literate parents learn to read even if they do not attend school, while the children of illiterate parents frequently fail to learn even in school. It is more precise to conclude that parents, not schools, have increased the levels of illiteracy" (my italics).

To recuperate: children from functionally illiterate parents suffer on several levels:

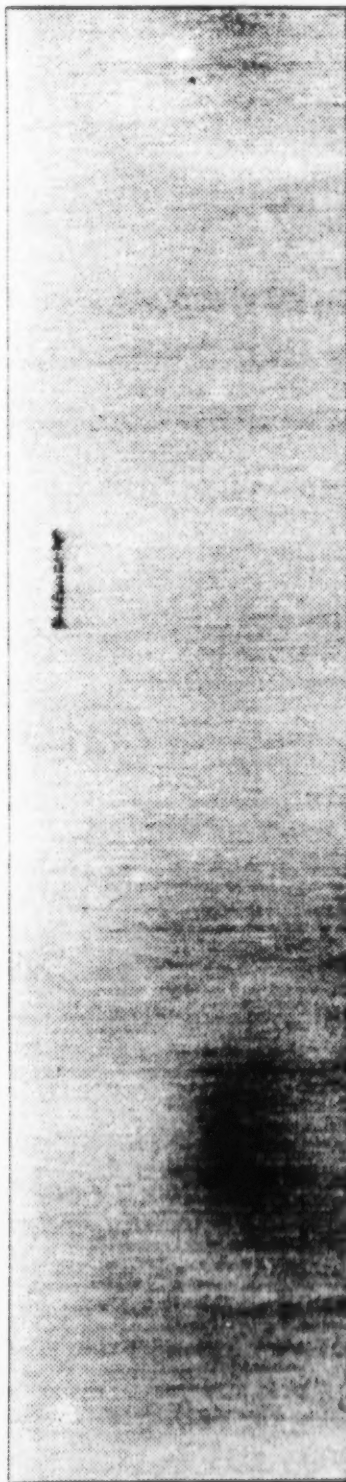
- due to a lack of a preschool reading readiness support system and a general apathy towards their learning progress once they have entered the school reading curriculum;
- due to their parents' inability and anxiety to assess the school's curriculum and the content of what they teach their children;
- due to the parents' impotence to take any political or local action in order to correct perceived wrongs or disagreements in the school curriculum if they come to learn about them. Indeed, parents whose children are most disadvantaged do not have the intellectual, i.e., literacy, requirements and energy to react against what they object about.

"They can speak loud; they cannot speak well. Soon enough, they cease to speak at all"

(Kozol, 1985, p.71).

In this perspective, it is important to recognize the privileged position Head Start programs and other day-care services provide: as reading readiness seems "half the battle," literacy services need to be incorporated within the operations of Head Start—services which should offer definite openings to include parents in "adult literacy programs." This, I believe, is an important task to be co-opted by Project Head Start as it already encompasses the necessary context for such an endeavor and as it is already located within the heart of the problem population.

This, however, does not imply that adult illiteracy can be approached as a mere extension of child reading readiness or children's reading curricula. Clearly, these are two distinct phenomenological



experiences and, as such, require two disparate though interconnected solutions. Indeed, while child illiteracy reflects a preventive project, adult illiteracy approaches need to be far more direct and applied, or a high immediate dropout is to be expected. On the one hand, it can be assumed that, as long as the parents remain motivated in their quest for literacy, they will support their children in reading-related activities. Due to these systemic and recursive qualities adult illiteracy might easily be considered a task with a higher priority as they will certainly either contribute to or undermine the child's literacy attempts. On the other hand, we cannot dismiss the strength of the child's motivations and achievements on the parents' own efforts. Hence, the importance of a double approach in order to prevent the "pedagogical timebomb" from going off.

As adult literacy programs only attract a minority of people who are in need of its services (approximately 10 percent), and as dropout rates remain high (approximately 50 to 75 percent), it seems that adult literacy project need to be structured differently (than e.g., children's reading classes) in order to "hook" its clientele. In contrast to curricula which reflect the (a priori abhorred) world of the classroom (with its emphasis on "reading-to-learn"), it seems that adult literacy programs need to be an extension of the world of the workplace characterized by an emphasis on "reading-to-do" and the reading requirements of "vocational competence" (cfr. Sticht, 1985). As Park (1987, p.40) indicates:

"The most effective way to teach literacy to adults is to integrate literacy and whatever functional skills the adult needs. This may mean completely abandoning the current system we have for teaching adult literacy and, instead, working in vocational training programs, parenting programs, businesses, and industries where adults train and retrain. In such settings, they would identify the educational skills—reading, math, or calculus—needed to succeed in learning or performing that new skill."

In this "version" of literacy it encompasses more than mere reading and writing techniques as it includes important communication and interpersonal skills. In this perspective, literacy training also includes a demarginalization aspect as the person not only learns how to make sense of his/her immediate (textual) environment but also, and simultaneously, becomes a contributing and participating member of society. Freed from the shackles of the "opinions of others" s/he can become a "good person" (in Socratic fashion) as one who no longer (needs to) blindly follow(s) others but can shape one's own destiny. Therefore, adult literacy programs, in their demarginalization aspect, again reflect the multidimensional impact of literacy training.

A slice of life (4)

Illiterates do not buy "no-name" products in the supermarkets. They must depend on photographs or the familiar logos that are printed on the packages of brand-name groceries. The poorest people, therefore, are denied the benefits of the least costly products.

Illiterates depend almost entirely upon label recognition. Many labels, however, are not easy to distinguish. Dozens of different kinds of Campbell's soup appear identical to the onreader. The purchaser who cannot read and does not dare to ask for help, out of fear of being stigmatized (a fear which is unfortunately realistic), frequently comes home with something which she never and her family never tasted.

Illiterates cannot read instructions on a pack of frozen foods. Packages sometimes provide an illustration to explain the cooking preparations but illustrations are of little help to someone

(continued on page 18)

Slice of life (4) continued

who must "boil wter, drop the food in its plastic wrapper—in the boiling water, wait for it to simmer, instantly remove."

Even when labels are seemingly clear, they may be easily mistaken. A woman in Detroit brought home a gallon of Crisco for her children's dinner. She thought she had bought the chicken that was pictured on the label. She had enough Crisco now to last a year—but no more money to go back and buy the food for dinner.

Recipes provided on the packages of certain staples sometimes tempt a semiliterate person to prepare a meal her children have not tasted. The longing to vary the uniform and often starchy contents of low-budget meals provided to the family that relies on food stamps commonly leads to disastrous results. Scarce funds have been wasted and the food must be thrown out. The same applies to distribution of food surplus.

(continued on page 19)

A Developmental Model of Literacy

A comprehensive and sequential model of the developmental aspects of literacy have been explored by Sticht et al. (1983). Figure I gives a summarized description of the model. Basically, the model contends that language development is the result of the interactions of the child's cognitive development (here modeled after Piaget and Gesell) and his/her immediate environment. As the Figure shows, a child's basic adaptive processes (sensorimotor) lead to receptive (sensoriperceptual) and productive (sensorimotoric) precursors to languaging. In a first stage of languaging (stage 3 in Figure I) the receptive pole results in "auding" (i.e., the act of listening

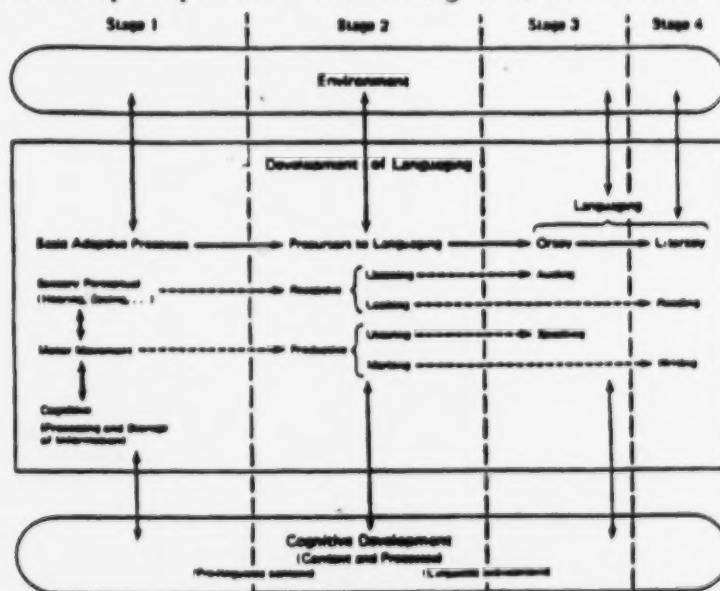


Figure 1. Overview of the developmental model of literacy.

in order to respond) while the productive pole leads to "speaking." In the second stage of actual language production, the receptive pole leads to "reading" while its motoric equivalent is the "writing." As such, illiteracy reflects a developmental arrest as illiterates have remained stuck in stage 3, while literates have, literally, "graduated" onto stage 4. In other words: literates have learned to use language in a "second way," namely as a transportable system of material signs. The primary importance of this materiality resides in the fact that the memory requirements of oracy can be relaxed while information can be "forgotten" as it remains readily available for recall at the time of application. As such, written language becomes an "external memory" system which allows literates to free up their memories and cognitive capacities in order to learn new tasks instead of having to remember every aspect of even simplest process. Literacy, as such, is nothing else than the luxury of being able to forget so something new can be learned.

Slice of life (4) continued

produce in emergency conditions. Government inducements to poor people to "explore the ways" by which to make a tasty meal from tasteless noodles, surplus cheese, and powdered milk are useless to nonreaders. Intended as benevolent advice, such recommendations mock reality and foster deeper feelings of resentment and of inability to cope. (Those, on the other hand, who cautiously refrain from "innovative" recipes in preparation of their children's meals must suffer the opprobrium of "laziness," "lack of imagination"...) (Source: Konol, 1985, p.25-26)

(Source: Konol,
1985, p.25-26)

CAUSES OF ILLITERACY

The Three Enemies of Reading

1. *Television*
2. *Illiterate Parents*
3. *Minimal School Standards*

[source: Dodson, 1987, p.14-15]

Although it is evident that the problem of illiteracy is a reflection of a more deep-seated problematic infrastructure of American society (e.g., the inequities in labor and payments between the ethnic groups, education levels, sexes and ages), it seems to be a category which cuts through all these distinctions. Functional illiteracy affects all races, both genders and all ages. Apart from more detailed socioeconomic and sociocultural factors which impact on the literacy problem, there seems to be incontrovertible evidence that the inescapable ubiquity of the visual media (especially television) has largely contributed and aggravated the problem. As Johnson (1984, p.237) contends:

"Since most television programming is aimed at a mental age of 12, it is likely to expand the horizon of younger children while simultaneously stunting or impeding the intellectual growth of students in their teens. Television does little to assist children in coping with a complex world. If the influence of television is as pervasive as it seems, then it is no longer surprising that students have little patience with activities requiring sustained complex thought or that they fail to exercise thoughtful judgment when balancing immediate reward against possible consequences. Nurtured on such a diet of inane programming, students rarely demonstrate restraint, and all too often reject anything, including school activities, that are not immediately entertaining."

Apart from these cognitively debilitating effects, other statistics are even more alarming in that preschool children watch approximately 54 hours of television weekly, which translated in the devastating constation that high school graduates have spent approximately 22,000 hours in front of the television—this is twice as much as the time they have spent in the classroom (approximately 11,000 hours). Closer examination tells us that the average high school graduate has been exposed to (some say, tortured by) more than 250,000 television commercials with their hidden (and not so hidden) messages of sexism, ageism and the glorification of drug anesthesia. The importance of this evolution has already percolated down to our everyday talk: how many times do we not hear the familiar phrase "I'll wait until the movie comes out" and how many college students do we know who gladly substitute their book review for a movie review (or, worse, who choose the books they will "read" and "review" in function of their availability in video format) ?

This trend, i.e., the replacement of imaginative reading by the prechewed chunks of the Hollywood Viewmaster, is often reinforced by a family context where parents—even if they are (functionally) literate—have abandoned all reading from their intellectual world. As these primary role-models have forsaken their role as "reading parent," their children will quickly decide to do the same (given the silent imprimatur of acceptability signaled by the parents' own behavior).

Finally, there are the lowered educational standards of schools which, under the moniker of "democratic education," have reduced academic excellence to the smallest common denominator of average class skills acquisition. In other words, the lower the class on average will score on reading, the lower the standard of pass/fail acceptance—standard no longer "connected" to any "standardized" criterion of performance or any indicator of "real world" adequacy and applicability. For many, the performance gamble of the bell curve remains the only criterion for within-class excellence and scholarship—however, conveniently forgetting the fact that the curve only reflects the performances of the class and not of that class in relation to job-market and academic needs and requirements. This game of self-deception, too often played in the realm of education, has an increased payoff in terms of lowered academic scholarship (and motivation for it) and of decreased literacy (in the general population).

A telling anecdote

I was flying from Los Angeles to give a lecture in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and had a stopover and change of planes in Chicago. During the flight I had been engrossed in a fascinating book by Paul Theroux called *Old Patagonian Express*.

After I deplaned in Chicago, I hunted down a telephone booth and called my wife. Then I went to the coffee shop to get a snack. I was just finishing up my snack when suddenly the thought hit me: "My book—where is my book?" I looked in my briefcase, but it wasn't there.

"Stupid!" I said to myself. "You must have left it on the plane." I hurried back to Gate 14. The plane was gone. I was mad and disappointed. Then a heartening thought came to me. "Wait a minute, Dummy. You left the book in your hand. You got off the plane, so you couldn't have left it there. What have you been doing since you

(continued on page 23)

In combination with these lowered educational standards, many blame the "Dick and Jane" approach to reading which favors the memorization of the visual configuration of a few stem words as the basis for a whole reading curriculum (see below for a more elaborate discussion). Dodson (1981, p.17-19) sums up his grievances as follows:

"Schools are supposed to teach reading. But in fact they fail to teach many of our children how to read except minimally. And they further fail to teach them to love reading. In fact, they teach them to hate it. (..) In many classes, the children are only learning to memorize words by the look-and-say method (I prefer to call it the look-and-guess method). (..) [M]emorizing words is not the same as reading. (..) [L]anguage is a code and teaching reading is teaching to crack the code using the 26 letters and 44 sounds. (..) The basic reason so many children fail to learn to read well in the first grade is that instead of being taught to sound out letters and syllables, they have memorized perhaps 450 words and have read a succession of dull, dull books based only on those words. (..) Reading, writing, and spelling all belong together and should be taught together (..) using phonics method."

"The 10 Commandments for Preparing Your Child to Read"

1. *Your child should know his name, address, and phone number.*
2. *His should be able to dress and undress himself.*
3. *He should know the names of his mother and father and their occupations.*
4. *He should know how to use the toilet properly and to wash his hands afterward.*
5. *He must know he will be expected to ask the teacher's permission to go to the restroom.*
6. *He must know that he is expected to take his turn, to speak up when asked a question, and understand that he must share toys, materials, and the teacher's attention with the other children.*
7. *He must know how to get to and from school and to observe necessary safety rules.*
8. *He should be taught to look upon the teacher as a friend and not be frightened by the teacher's authoritative disciplinary measures.*
9. *It is wise to let your child meet his teacher and see his classroom before school begins.*
10. *If possible, accompany your child to school the first day.*

[source: Melton, 1976, p.53]

A telling anecdote continued
got off the plane? Aha, the telephone call!" I hurried back to the phone booth and discovered my inner voice was right. There was the book, sitting on the ledge inside the booth.

My relief and delight were great, but then I began to mull over the incident. It had been over a half hour since I had left the book there. Yet no one had taken it.

Suppose I had left my wallet half an hour? Would it have been there when I got back? Obviously not.

Suppose I had left a five-dollar bill? Or even a one-dollar bill? Someone certainly would have swiped it.

Suppose I had left even my ballpoint pen? Someone probably would have made off with it.

And yet I had left this excellent book, worth probably nine or ten dollars, and no one had taken it. Why

(continues on page 24)

A telling anecdote continued

The answer came, clear and strong. *No one steals books in the United States.* Why? Because people don't value books enough to steal them. And the reason they don't value them is that only a minority of Americans likes to read.

[source: Dodson, 1981, p.1-2]

TOWARDS A SOLUTION

Earlier, it was indicated that—although an interactive reinforcement effect fuels the literacy cycle—an important distinction needs to be made between “children’s reading curricula” and “adult literacy programs.” While the former have a preventive (and educational) nature and, therefore, fit within the “normal” school confines of “learning,” “adult learning” needs to be couched within the pragmatic applications of the job world as well as the daily survival skills of life (e.g., reading bus signs, restaurant menus, medicine prescriptions). Although the emphasis is different—primarily to assure against dropout—the reading process, in its developmental cycle (see Figure I), is the same—only delayed in the adult population. The problem of literacy training, therefore, is primarily a methodological issue and, as such, applies to both children’s and adult populations.

The question of reading readiness

With Piaget and Gesell we agree that the whole concept of “readiness” refers to a spontaneous state of openness to do something new, a willingness to embark upon a new experience. In this capacity, readiness refers to a potential which cannot be learned or coaxed into action: some children are ready early, other children take their time. However, in general, authors agree that a generally supportive atmosphere in favor of intellectual, cognitive and emotional stimulation increases the child’s readiness for the adventure of reading. As with all developmental stages in life, the time and the supportive context must be ripe for this step to occur. However, this

does not imply (as do Piaget and Gesell) that children grow up in a contextual vacuum that does not affect their development; in contrast, Melton (1976, p.53-55) suggests the "*Ten Commandments for Preparing your Child to Read*" which build a context of support that may prepare a child's self-esteem for the budding adventure of literacy.

A simple reading-readiness primer

The basic foundation for the child's reading skills lies in the preparation to reading provided by his or her own parents. "Parents are the major influence in a child's development as a reader. *At school [s]he can build on the foundation [s]he has gotten at home.* Without that foundation [s]he will probably have a struggle" (Larrick). Here, again, can be discerned the devastating effect of the illiteracy cycle on the young child—effect which already plays an important role before the child starts to actually read. As a result, by the time the child goes to first grade to learn "how to read," this ability will already be substantially molded by the kind of reading readiness stimuli and skills that were provided during his or her preschool years. Here lies an important task not only for Head Start specifically, but for the blossoming day-care movement in general.

With Dodson (1981), the following developmental program for parents and service providers is suggested:

a. Babyhood (birth ~ walking)

The following tasks all contribute to the baby's primary developmental task in this stage of life, i.e., *building of basic trust* (Erikson):

- talk to and cuddle your baby when feeding him/her
- sing to your baby
(the actual words do not matter only the fact that the child gets familiar with the act of "linguaging" and "sounding")

-
- play different types and styles of ethnic music, so that the child learns to distinguish between different tempos, timbres, rhythms and sounds. [For a good children's music catalog: *Children's Book and Music Center*, 2400 Santa Monica Boulevard, Santa Monica, CA 90404).]
 - reinforce baby's first cooing "language" (beginning of second month) and applaud the nonsensical gibberish responses of the child to your own conversations and questions (8 months).

b. Toddlerhood (walking ~ 2 years)

In this developmental phase, exploration and discovery and the ensuing reinforcement of the child's self-confidence take a central position. The following tasks not only foster this development, they also increase the child's reading readiness.

- playing "Label the World" with your child (i.e., naming everything you touch or do)
- read books aloud for children—books that also deal with giving names to the world (recommended e.g., Richard Scarry's *Best Word Book Ever*, Dr. Seuss' *The Cat in the Hat Picture Dictionary*)
- read/sing nursery rhymes for child which, due to their intrinsic rhythm and cadence, hold a special fascination for the child's mind and ears.
[Avoid sexist rhymes!]

c. First Adolescence (two ~ three years)

As a transitional stage to the preschool years, the "terrible two's" are characterized by the rebellious NO, which might make it increasingly difficult to get the child to sit down and listen to stories or your conversations. Alternatively, the child's high energy level and curiosity can now be utilized and applied toward similar goals:

- keep on reading nursery rhymes but make them more applied, i.e., show their connection to daily activities and use them while doing a certain chore round the house (let the child either do or help out with the chore while singing the rhyme).
- read aloud books with short but continuous stories
- print object names on cue cards and place or tape them on the corresponding "things" in the child's immediate living environment

- hold longer conversations with the child (if possible)—try to use more open-ended questions which require more than a “yes/no” answer from the child
- make a blackboard available to the child on which s/he can make his/her first “primitive scribbles”—an important precursor to the actual act of writing, not only psychologically but also sensorimotorically (development of finger-thumb small-muscle coordination). The blackboard also allows for another (alternative) outlet for the child’s rebelliousness so typical for this developmental stage.

d. Preschool Years (three ~ six years)

After the rebellious phase the child normally becomes again more open to the adult’s conversations and suggestions for learning-through-play. Typically, preschoolers have an *idiosyncratic developmental evolution*, in that, for the first time, a child’s talent for certain activities begins to shine through. Therefore, the following “tasks” can apply either sooner or later to a particular child: never push a child into an activity you know s/he is not ready for or incapable of, in order to avoid unnecessary anxiety or, worse, a complete withdrawal from reading-related activities.

- keep on reading short stories: children are especially fascinated by stories of fantasy and imagination. However, do not overindulge this sense of the fantastic and add enough stories which have a basis in reality. Indeed, stories about lightning or how birds build a nest can be as entertaining as any fairy tale but have the added dimension that they teach children a “truer” lesson for life and a better understanding of the world around them. In contrast to adults (who maybe need a strange fairy tale to perk their interest or to escape from the doldrums of their daily routines), children are fascinated and involved with every small thing in their environment. Of course, there is nothing “wrong” with the fantasies of fairy tales as long as we do not expect the child to actually believe that those “things” truly exist and are, as such, more than just a story.
- provide structurally instituted times for “story-telling,” e.g., make it a habit, a ritual, to tell your child a bedtime story at a certain hour.
- praise or reward a child by buying him/her a new book, or the promise of “an extra story” at bedtime.
- encourage the child’s word play (even if nonsensical or mispronounced) and help it invent new word games. Play a game such as “Funny Words” where you and your child take turns inventing funny-sounding words.

- ask a child for his/her opinion on something it sees, that happens or you do
- build (or buy) a bookcase for the child's books and help him/her arrange the books. Stress the fact that the bookcase belongs to the child (and not to you, the parent)
- buy magnetic letters and stick them to the refrigerator door (do not teach their meaning if the child is not ready!). [Alternatives: rubber stamp letters, toy blocks with letters and numbers on.]
- buy the child a cheap cassette-recorder and teach it how it can record voices, songs, nursery rhymes, etc. Initially, alternate between you and your child until it knows the exact operations of the recorder. Award "prizes" for "good recordings."
- [Only when you feel the child is ready:]
Teach your child how to print the letters of the alphabet (start with uppercase letters)

Teach the child how to print his or her own name.

Then, teach the child the other letters of the alphabet in the following sequence: I, L, X, T, H, F, E, V, O, Q, A, M, N, P, U, C, W, D, Y, Z, K, B, J, S, G.

The 22 skills of Reading-Readiness

1. He can listen carefully and pay attention.
2. He can discriminate among sounds and words that sound alike, but are different.
3. He has a curiosity about words.
4. He can speak words and sentences clearly and correctly.
5. He has a well-developed oral vocabulary.
6. He has a love of language and the cadence of words.
7. He enjoys talking.
8. He has an intense curiosity about the varied information to be found in the world, including the world of books.
9. He has a good imagination.
10. He knows how to think.
11. He can follow directions.
12. He has self-confidence, especially in expressing himself and trying new things.
13. He has had wide experience in many areas, as a background for understanding what he reads.
14. He can visually discriminate letters, especially those that look alike, such as "b" and "d".
15. He uses left-to-right eye movements easily and comfortably.
16. He can recognize and name the capital letters.
17. He can recognize and name the lowercase letters.
18. He can associate the appropriate speech sounds with different letters.
19. He has developed good eye-hand coordination, necessary for printing and writing, which are close allies of reading.
20. He can print the capital letters.
21. He can print the lowercase letters.
22. He is eager to learn how to read.

-
-
- transport this lesson to other areas of the child's environment, e.g., the refrigerator letters, the blackboard in his/her room, the toy blocks, even the can of alphabet soup.
 - [Only if the child is ready:]
Read a story that the child already knows out of a book with printed (all uppercase) letters—show child how words are made of letters (i.e., sounds) and how sentences are made of words.

Reminder

It is important to recognize that the development of reading readiness differs from child to child. Under no circumstance force the child onto tasks you know it is not ready for—the result will only be the opposite of what you hope for and could prove disastrous in the long run (e.g., slow erosion of child's self-esteem).

Conclusion:

Given the emphasis put on reading readiness it is evident that an important conglomerate of psychological and sociosemantic influences need to be fostered in order for a child to pick up that book and read its first line (of, hopefully, many). Here, again, we cannot ignore the importance of the primary (and secondary) caregivers in preventing the perpetuation of the cycle of illiteracy. Apart from the specific suggestions offered before, it is necessary to summarize the psychological state of self-esteem and social involvement which underwrites the readiness to read. With Gans (1963) we agree that four essential dimensions need to be fully developed:

- (1) an eagerness to be independent rather than spoon-fed and coddled (p.20)
- (2) an unquenchable zest to explore the new in the big, widening world about him (p.21)
- (3) the courage to try himself out at new skills and to take success and some defeats (p.22), [and]
- (4) the enjoyment of being with others and learning from them (p.23).

Reading: A Methodological Obstacle

"[T]he normal children of America have been taught to read by a method originally conceived and used in the early 1800's to teach the deaf how to read, a method which has long since been discarded by the teachers of the deaf themselves as inadequate and outmoded. Yet, today, the vast majority of normal American children are still being taught to read by this very method. The result has been widespread reading disability" (Blumenfeld, 1973, p.9-10). For many authors the current epidemic of illiteracy which plagues one third of the American adult population (i.e., not included the many adolescents who can barely make it through their reading assignments) can be blamed on the way reading at present is being taught in our schools, i.e., *the whole-word method*.

This method assumes that written language becomes a matter of word-recognition, i.e., that language is nothing but a seemingly random sea of arbitrary signs which can only be deciphered by means of a photographic memory for certain stem words and the right phonetic clues. In other "words," words are learned (i.e., "memorized") as being whole entities (i.e., not made up of a specific succession of alphabetic signs corresponding to phonic sounds). This didactic tactic, almost of necessity, leads to the familiar strategy of word-guessing and letter-reversal when a child (and, later, the adult) encounters (and

writes) a strange word. Not only does this method confuse "learning to read" with "memorizing the visual cues of certain stem words," it immediately "forgets" to teach the child the whole structural foundation of language, i.e., the way words are built from scratch, i.e., from a succession of sounds. Therefore, Blumenfeld (1973, p.201) concludes:

"Under no circumstances should you permit your child to be taught a sight vocabulary. The sight vocabulary is the thalidomide of modern elementary education, and you run the risk of turning your child into a sorry dyslexic by subjecting him to sight-vocabulary methodology, no matter how much phonics they may teach in conjunction with it."

In contrast, many argue in favor of the *phonics system* which should be taught before the child starts to go to school. Hence, the importance that was previously attached to teaching the child the alphabetic symbols in isolation (i.e., the letters themselves and their corresponding phonic sound) and in sequence (i.e., how the letters spell out a certain word, e.g., the child's name). Teaching the alphabetic principles of sound and sequence provides the backbone of the reading process—a

process which resembles "true learning" in contrast to the mere "memorization" of stem words and their phonetic rules.

Basically, recognition of the 26 alphabetic letters (not to forget the 9 numeric signs which make up another aspect of literacy), learning how to print them, and writing them out when asked—these are the fundamental skills of literacy. If this basic lesson has been omitted or only obliquely been approached, problems with reading and writing (especially spelling) will necessarily ensue.

While the comments on reading readiness primarily applied to young children, the importance of the phonics system applies both to children and adults. Teaching adults how to read need not, qua process, substantially differ from the way children are taught—there is, however, a distinctive difference qua content in that (as was mentioned before) adults need to have the feeling that reading will have immediate repercussions on their working environment or their job placement potential (i.e., "reading-to-do" in contrast to "reading-to-learn").

Within the confines of the present paper, it is not the intention to design a full-scale curriculum for "adult learners"—many such curricula are currently being developed and experimented with. However, teaching the basic alphabetic building blocks remain the first and most needed task at hand.

A slice of life (5)

"All of our mail we get, it's hard for her to read. Settin' down and writing a letter, she can't do it. Like if we get a bill ... we take it over to my sister-in-law ... My sister-in-law reads it."

"I've lost a lot of jobs," one man explains. "Today, even if you're a janitor, there's still reading and writing ... They have a note saying, 'Go to room so-and-so ... You can't do it. You can't read it. You don't know.'"

"The hardest thing about it is that I've been places where I didn't know where I was. You don't know where you are ... You're lost."

"Like I said: I have two kids. What do I do if one of my kids starts choking? I go running to the phone ... I can't look up the hospital phone number. That's if we're at home. Out on the street, I can't read the sign. I get to a pay phone. 'Okay, tell us where you are. We'll send an ambulance.'" I look at the street sign. Right there, I can't tell you what it says. I'd have to spell it out, letter for letter. By that time, one of my kids could be dead ... These are the kinds of fears you go with every single day ..."

"Reading directions, I suffer with. I work with chemicals ... That's scary to begin with ..."

[source: Kozol, 19854, p.27]

LITERACY TRAINING AN

"We do what we can not what we want"

Apart from commonsense lessons (e.g., the need for the reading curricula, smaller classes for reading and of and more advanced training for teachers who teach utmost importance that the act of reading and writing vehicle towards learning other "more important" or "r geometry), but as a skill in itself. Obviously, how can one starts out with a cracked foundation or no foundation and writing in favor of other "scholarly" or "athletic" proof of the literacy problems encountered in the classroom are re-(e)valuation needs to start now—in the home (and, by the child starts to read!

Therefore, it is primordial that teachers who teach as an important mission and a valuable contribution to This entails that teachers—and this is particularly the case familiarize themselves with new teaching methods at edge base of what is required to be "functionally literate informed can they be of help to those who are in doubt however, immediately implies a much-needed societal financial) upgrading of the importance these teachers—as of our wealth and our life-style.

With Park (1987, p.39) we summarize the current state

- (1) Educators must improve the teaching of reading to reach the 5 percent who have not even acquired literacy before graduating or dropping out.
- (2) Educators must help poor and minority parents particularly prior to school. This will prevent them
- (3) Finally, educators must take the lead in improving This can only be done by an integrated approach comprehension skills needed for adults in job training roles, or in typical schools.

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